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REPORT ON FABIAN POLICY

AND

RESOLUTIONS

PRESENTED BY

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

TO THE

International Socialist Workers and Trade
Union Congress, London, 1896.

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REPORT ON FABIAN POLICY.

I.

The Mission of the Fabians.

THE object of the Fabian Society is to persuade the English people to make their political constitution thoroughly democratic and so to socialize their industries as to make the livelihood of the people entirely independent of private Capitalism.

The Fabian Society endeavors to pursue its Socialist and Democratic objects with complete singleness of aim. For example :—

It has no distinctive opinions on the Marriage Question, Religion, Art, abstract Economics, historic Evolution, Currency, or any other subject than its own special business of practical Democracy and Socialism.

It brings all the pressure and persuasion in its power to bear on existing forces, caring nothing by what name any party calls itself, or what principles, Socialist or other, it professes, but having regard solely to the tendency of its actions, supporting those which make for Socialism and Democracy, and opposing those which are reactionary.

It does not propose that the practical steps towards Social-Democracy should be carried out by itself, or by any other specially organized society or party.

It does not ask the English people to join the Fabian Society.

II.

Fabian Electoral Tactics.

The Fabian Society does not claim to be the people of England, or even the Socialist party, and therefore does not seek direct political representation by putting forward Fabian candidates at elections. But it loses no opportunity of influencing elections and inducing constituencies to select Socialists as their candidates. No person, however, can obtain the support of the Fabian Society, or escape its opposition, by merely repeating a few shibboleths and calling himself a Socialist or Social-Democrat. As there is no

Second Ballot in England, frivolous candidatures give great offence, and discredit the party in whose name they are undertaken, because any third candidate who is not well supported will not only be beaten himself, but may also involve in his defeat the better of the two candidates competing with him. Under such circumstances the Fabian Society throws its weight against the third candidate, whether he calls himself a Socialist or not, in order to secure the victory to the better of the two candidates between whom the contest really lies. But when the third candidate is not only a serious representative of Socialism, but can organize his party well, and is likely to poll sufficient votes to make even his defeat a respectable demonstration of the strength and growth of Socialism in the constituency, the Fabian Society supports him resolutely under all circumstances and against all other parties.

III.

Fabian Toleration.

The Fabian Society, far from holding aloof from other bodies, urges its members to lose no opportunity of joining them and permeating them with Fabian ideas as far as possible. Almost all organizations and movements contain elements making for Socialism, no matter how remote the sympathies and intentions of their founders may be from those of the Socialists. On the other hand, unintentionally reactionary proposals are constantly being brought forward in Socialist bodies. Fabians are therefore encouraged to join all other organizations, Socialist or non-Socialist, in which Fabian work can be done.

IV.

Fabian Constitutionalism.

The Fabian Society is perfectly constitutional in its attitude; and its methods are those usual in political life in England.

The Fabian Society accepts the conditions imposed on it by human nature and by the national character and political circumstances of the English people. It sympathizes with the ordinary citizen's desire for gradual, peaceful changes, as against revolution, conflict with the army and police, and martyrdom. It recognizes the fact that Social-Democracy is not the whole of the working-class program, and that every separate measure towards the socialization of industry will have to compete for precedence with numbers of other reforms. It therefore does not believe that the moment will ever come when the whole of Socialism will be staked on the issue of a single General Election or a single Bill in the House of Commons, as between the proletariat on one side and the proprietariat on the other. Each instalment of Social-Democracy will only be a measure among other measures, and will have to be kept to the front by an energetic Socialist section. The Fabian Society therefore begs those Socialists who are looking forward to a sensational historical crisis, to join some other Society.

V.

Fabian Democracy.

Democracy, as understood by the Fabian Society, means simply the control of the administration by freely elected representatives of the people. The Fabian Society energetically repudiates all conceptions of Democracy as a system by which the technical work of government administration, and the appointment of public officials, shall be carried on by referendum or any other form of direct popular decision. Such arrangements may be practical in a village community, but not in the complicated industrial civilizations which are ripening for Social-Democracy. When the House of Commons is freed from the veto of the House of Lords and thrown open to candidates from all classes by an effective system of Payment of Representatives and a more rational method of election, the British parliamentary system will be, in the opinion of the Fabian Society, a first-rate practical instrument of democratic government.

Democracy, as understood by the Fabian Society, makes no political distinction between men and women.

VI.

Fabian Compromise.

The Fabian Society, having learnt from experience that Socialists cannot have their own way in everything any more than other people, recognizes that in a Democratic community Compromise is a necessary condition of political progress.

VII.

Fabian Socialism.

Socialism, as understood by the Fabian Society, means the organization and conduct of the necessary industries of the country, and the appropriation of all forms of economic rent of land and capital by the nation as a whole, through the most suitable public authorities, parochial, municipal, provincial, or central.

The Socialism advocated by the Fabian Society is State Socialism exclusively. The foreign friends of the Fabian Society must interpret this declaration in view of the fact that since England now possesses an elaborate democratic State machinery, graduated from the Parish Council or Vestry up to the central Parliament, and elected under a franchise which enables the working-class vote to overwhelm all others, the opposition which exists in the Continental monarchies between the State and the people does not hamper English Socialists. For example, the distinction made between State Socialism and Social-Democracy in Germany, where the municipalities and other local bodies are closed against the working classes, has no meaning in England. The difficulty in England is not to secure more political power for the people, but to persuade them to make any sensible use of the power they already have.

VIII.

Fabian Individualism.

The Fabian Society does not suggest that the State should monopolize industry as against private enterprise or individual initiative further than may be necessary to make the livelihood of the people and their access to the sources of production completely independent of both. The freedom of individuals to test the social value of new inventions; to initiate improved methods of production; to anticipate and lead public enterprise in catering for new social wants; to practise all arts, crafts, and professions independently; in short, to complete the social organization by adding the resources of private activity and judgment to those of public routine, is, subject to the above conditions, as highly valued by the Fabian Society as Freedom of Speech, Freedom of the Press, or any other article in the charter of popular liberties.

IX.

Fabian Freedom of Thought.

The Fabian Society strenuously maintains its freedom of thought and speech with regard to the errors of Socialist authors, economists, leaders and parties, no less than to those of its opponents. For instance, it insists on the necessity of maintaining as critical an attitude towards Marx and Lassalle, some of whose views must by this time be discarded as erroneous or obsolete, as these eminent Socialists themselves maintained towards their predecessors, St. Simon and Robert Owen.

X.

Fabian Journalism.

The Fabian Society, in its relations with the Press, makes no such distinction as that indicated by the phrase "the Capitalist Press." In England all political papers without exception are conducted with private capital under the control of the owners of the capital. Some of them profess Socialist opinions, others Conservative opinions, others Liberal and Radical opinions, and so forth. The Socialist papers are in no way more independent of social pressure than the others; and the superiority of a Socialist paper from the Socialist point of view is of exactly the same nature as the superiority of a Conservative paper from the Conservative point of view. The Fabian Society, in securing journalistic expression for its ideas, has no preference, except for the largest circulation.

XI.

Fabians and the Middle Class

In view of the fact that the Socialist movement has been hitherto inspired, instructed, and led by members of the middle class or "bourgeoisie," the Fabian Society, though not at all surprised to

find these middle class leaders attacking with much bitterness the narrow social ideals current in their own class, protests against the absurdity of Socialists denouncing the very class from which Socialism has sprung as specially hostile to it. The Fabian Society has no romantic illusions as to the freedom of the proletariat from these same narrow ideals. Like every other Socialist society, it can only educate the people in Socialism by making them conversant with the conclusions of the most enlightened members of all classes. The Fabian Society, therefore, cannot reasonably use the words "bourgeois" or "middle class" as terms of reproach, more especially as it would thereby condemn a large proportion of its own members.

XII.

Fabian Natural Philosophy.

The Fabian Society endeavors to rouse social compunction by making the public conscious of the evil condition of society under the present system. This it does by the collection and publication of authentic and impartial statistical tracts, compiled, not from the works of Socialists, but from official sources. The first volume of Karl Marx's "Das Kapital," which contains an immense mass of carefully verified facts concerning modern capitalistic civilization, and practically nothing about Socialism, is probably the most successful propagandist work ever published. The Fabian Society, in its endeavors to continue the work of Marx in this direction, has found that the guesses made by Socialists at the condition of the people almost invariably flatter the existing system instead of, as might be suspected, exaggerating its evils. The Fabian Society therefore concludes that in the natural philosophy of Socialism, light is a more important factor than heat.

XIII.

Fabian Repudiations.

The Fabian Society discards such phrases as "the abolition of the wage system," which can only mislead the public as to the aims of Socialism. Socialism does not involve the abolition of wages, but the establishment of standard allowances for the maintenance of all workers by the community in its own service, as an alternative to wages fixed by the competition of destitute men and women for private employment, as well as to commercial profits, commissions, and all other speculative and competitive forms of remuneration. In short, the Fabian Society, far from desiring to abolish wages, wishes to secure them for everybody.

The Fabian Society resolutely opposes all pretensions to hamper the socialization of industry with equal wages, equal hours of labor, equal official status, or equal authority for everyone. Such conditions are not only impracticable, but incompatible with the equality of subordination to the common interest which is fundamental in modern Socialism.

The Fabian Society steadfastly discountenances all schemes for securing to any person, or any group of persons, "the entire product of their labor." It recognizes that wealth is social in its origin and must be social in its distribution, since the evolution of industry has made it impossible to distinguish the particular contribution that each person makes to the common product, or to ascertain its value.

The Fabian Society desires to offer to all projectors and founders of Utopian communities in South America, Africa, and other remote localities, its apologies for its impatience of such adventures. To such projectors, and all patrons of schemes for starting similar settlements and workshops at home, the Society announces emphatically that it does not believe in the establishment of Socialism by private enterprise.

XIV.

Finally.

The Fabian Society does not put Socialism forward as a panacea for the ills of human society, but only for those produced by defective organization of industry and by a radically bad distribution of wealth.

RESOLUTIONS.

I.

The Eight Hours Day.

The Congress declares its adhesion to the resolution regarding the Eight Hours Day passed at the Zurich Congress, and puts forward the following proposals as the immediate steps to be taken towards the introduction of that reform and as the irreducible minimum of the demands of Labor :—

1. That the hours of labor for all Government and Municipal employees shall be at most eight per day or forty-eight per week ;
2. That in the mining, railway, and baking industries, and in all dangerous trades, the working-day shall be limited to eight hours ;
3. That in all other industries the Minister responsible for Labor shall be bound, on the demand of a Labor organization, to institute an enquiry into the hours of labor in any given trade, and to issue, subject to formal revision by the Legislature, such regulations as may, to his expert advisers, seem expedient ;

4. That, subject to cases of unforeseen emergency, for which an indemnity must be obtained from the Minister responsible for Labor, overtime above the hours specified in the foregoing clauses shall be prohibited.

II.

Child Labor.

Considering—

That the employment of children in industry at too early an age is not only injurious to their health, but also causes physical deterioration in following generations; that their competition is used to beat down the wages of adult workers; and that the only possible excuse for the employment of children, namely, the training of them to be efficient workers, no longer exists owing to the breakdown of the apprenticeship system through the development of extreme specialization in manufacturing processes,

This Congress demands—

1. That the minimum age at which children can be employed as half-timers shall be raised at once to 14 years, and in *two* years time to 16.
2. That the minimum age for full-timers shall be similarly fixed at 16 years, and in two years at 18.
3. That in mines, glass-works, iron-works, and all dangerous trades, the minimum age of employment shall be 16.
4. That the State shall provide an efficient system of technical education, free and compulsory, with maintenance, for children between the time of their leaving the elementary school and the age at which they can be fully employed as workers.

III.

Factory Legislation.

Considering—

That it is one of the chief duties of the State to secure the health and safety of the workers, but that this duty cannot be effectually fulfilled unless it is undertaken in a scientific manner,

The Congress demands—

1. That every Government shall institute committees of experts (including machine workers) to study the best means of preventing accidents from the different kinds of machinery;
2. That every Government shall also establish laboratories for the investigation of the safest processes of manufacture;
3. That, supported by the opinion of his expert advisers, the Minister responsible for Labor shall have power to issue departmental regulations in such matters as the fencing of machinery, precautions to be taken in manufacture, etc., and also, subject to revision of his orders by the Legislature, to prohibit processes as dangerous;

4. That the white-lead industry and the making of matches from yellow phosphorus—dangerous occupations for which safe and effectual substitutes are acknowledged to exist—shall be at once prohibited.

IV.

Women's Work.

That this Congress approves the principle of equal pay for equal work ; and of equal opportunities for educational and technical training for men and women ; and strongly urges, for the benefit of both sexes, the immediate practical application of this principle.

V.

Government Workshops.

This Congress, recognizing that even under the present order of society the manufacture by the Government of all the commodities which it requires to perform the functions entrusted to it by the nation can be made the means of setting a fair standard of employment and of putting down sweating, but that at the same time it can be used simply as tax-saving machinery and a weapon of political servitude, urges the electors to press upon their respective Governments to do all their own industrial work themselves, without the intervention of a private contractor, on the following conditions :—

1. That the working-day shall be limited to eight hours ;
2. That the wages paid shall be at least equal to those paid by the best private employers ;
3. That a sufficient pension shall be paid to employees when incapacitated by age or accident ;
4. That a week's holiday per year on full pay shall be secured to each worker ;
5. That no worker shall be hindered by any departmental regulations in the exercise of his ordinary rights as a private citizen.

VI.

Nationalization and Municipalization of Industry.

In view of the importance of losing no opportunity of transferring industrial capital from private to public control, and securing to as many wage-workers as possible the comparative independence and permanence of employment enjoyed by public servants, especially in the more democratic countries, this Congress recommends all workers to agitate and vote in favor of :

1. The immediate nationalization of all mines, railways, canals, telegraphs, telephones, and other national monopolies ;

2. The immediate municipalization of the supply of water, gas, electric light ; of docks, markets, tramways, omnibus services, and pawnbroking ; lake and river steamboat services ; and of all other local monopolies ;
3. The immediate undertaking by public authorities of : (a) the manufacture and retailing of tobacco and bread ; of the supply of coal, milk, and other universal necessities ; and of the building of dwellings for the workers ; (b) the manufacture and retailing of alcoholic drinks.

VII.

The Unemployed.

The Congress declares :

That the existence of a class of unemployed willing but unable to find work is a necessary result of the present industrial system, in which every improvement in machinery throws fresh masses of men out of work, and the competition of capitalists for the market produces recurring commercial crises ;

That, consequently, unemployment can only be abolished with the complete abolition of the competitive system, and can only be limited in proportion as order and regulation are introduced into the present competitive confusion ;

That while this process of evolution towards the co-operative state is proceeding, the following measures are urgently demanded to relieve the pressure on the industrial market :

The Eight Hours Day ;

The Prohibition of Child-Labor under sixteen ;

The Manufacture by the Government and Municipality of all commodities required by them ;

The extension of Municipal Activity to the complete supply of all common services and the provision of healthy dwellings for the workers ;

The undertaking of useful Public Works in special cases.

VIII.

War and Foreign Policy.

That this Congress desires to call attention to the following facts concerning the great armaments maintained by modern capitalistic States :

1. That these armies act as a standing menace, not to neighboring States, but to the working populations of their own countries. A study of the strategical disposition of many of the great railway stations and barracks of the Continent will prove that the most important function of the modern army is to suppress the resistance of Labor to Capital in the war of classes.

2. That these huge armaments, far from making the nations powerful in international affairs, actually paralyze them through the intense fear and mistrust they engender. The Congress, repudiating the bravado of the capitalist press, emphatically declares that the nations it represents find it impossible to act in international affairs because of their jealousy of one another's intentions and their fear of one another's threats. The Congress points to recent events in Europe and the South of Africa as proving that the smallest States can successfully defy the interference of the great European military powers by adroitly playing off the one against the other.
3. That since the resistance of the capitalist classes to any interference by the State in commercially profitable enterprises makes it impossible to use national armaments to enforce order and public responsibility in the colonization and settlement of new countries, such operations are now left to filibusters acting as the agents of Chartered Companies. The rapacity of these companies, the aggressions of the irresponsible adventurers who lead their armed forces, and the competition of rival companies, produce endless disputes, in which each company calls on its mother country to support it by arms in the name of patriotism, the chairman being represented in the capitalist press as an imperial statesman, and its filibusters as national heroes. Thus the great European States, whilst they are powerless to undertake the work of colonization themselves, are expected to hold themselves continually in readiness to go to war, not only with barbarous races, but with one another, in defence of enterprises over which they have no control. The Congress desires to warn the workers of Europe against these appeals to national pride and love of military glory, and to repeat that the tendency of the capitalist system is to make the army a catspaw for the speculator instead of an instrument of national greatness and honor.
4. That the only possible guarantee for the peace of the world lies in the consolidation of the interests of the most advanced States on a Social-Democratic basis. War exists at present mainly because huge profits can be made out of it by sections of the community. If this were made impossible by the socialization of industry in England, France, Germany and the United States of America, these four nations would not only cease to threaten one another, but would combine to impose peace on nations less advanced in social organization. Therefore, the Congress, whilst sympathizing heartily with the objects of the Peace and Arbitration Societies, urges them to bear constantly in mind that until the antagonism of social interests which produces conflicts between Capital and Labor at home is dissolved, international solidarity must remain impossible.

IX.

Prisons.

That this Congress earnestly presses upon Humanitarians and advocates of reform of the criminal law, that the greatest obstacle to the attainment of their ends is the dependence of the capitalist system on a low standard of life and comfort among the mass of wage-workers. All attempts to make prison labor productive are regarded by private capitalists as attempts to compete with them and reduce their profits; and all reforms that aim at making prison life less cruel and more wholesome are resented in all classes on the ground that criminals should not be treated better than honest men. The Congress therefore urges the necessity of improving the conditions of the masses outside the prisons as the surest means of ameliorating the lot of those who are inside them.

X.

Women's Political Rights.

That this Congress calls upon all Trade Unionists and Socialists to strive energetically to secure to women complete equality with men in all political rights and duties.

XI.

The Referendum.

That this Congress warns associations of the working classes throughout the world to scrutinize with great care all proposals for transferring direct legislative and administrative power, including the appointment of public officials, from representative bodies to the mass of the electors. The people can only judge political measures by their effect when they have come into operation: they cannot plan measures themselves, or foresee what their effect will be, or give precise instructions to their representatives; nor can any honest representative tell, until he has heard a measure thoroughly discussed by representatives of all other sections of the working class, what form the measure should take so as to keep the interests of his constituents in due subordination to those of the community. It is to be considered, further, that intelligent reformers, especially workmen who have grasped the principles of Socialism, are always in a minority: they may address themselves with success to the sympathies of the masses and gain their confidence; but the dry detail of the legislative and administrative steps by which they move towards their goal can never be made interesting or intelligible to the ordinary voter. For these reasons the Referendum, in theory the most democratic of popular institutions, is in practice the most reactionary, and is actually being strenuously advocated in England by noted leaders of anti-Socialist opinion with the openly declared

intention of using it to stop all further progress towards Social Democracy. Again, the election of public officials by the general vote makes the official not only independent of the representatives of the people, but makes him practically irremovable, and therefore autocratic, as long as he does not openly scandalize public opinion by expressing unconventional views. The ordinary man, unable to judge whether important public functions are efficiently discharged or not, and reluctant to turn a man out of his employment without some very grave reason for doing so, invariably votes for the retention of an office by its present holder. This has been abundantly proved by the experience of English Trade Unions, in which the bureau, elected by the votes of all the members, is all-powerful, the sole exception being those unions in the cotton industry in which the officials are directly controlled by a representative body and not by the mass of members. The Congress, therefore, without attempting to lay down any general rule in the matter, most earnestly urges its supporters and sympathisers in all countries to study democratic institutions in the light of practice and not of theory alone; to take careful note of the fact that the Referendum, the Initiative, the election of officials by universal suffrage, and the reduction of representative bodies to mere meetings of delegates recording the foregone conclusions of their constituents, usually produce results exactly the opposite of those expected from them by Democrats, and to oppose them strenuously in all cases where their effect would be to place the organized, intelligent and class-conscious Socialist minority at the mercy of the unorganized and apathetic mass of routine toilers, imposed upon by the prestige of the aristocratic, plutocratic and clerical forces of reaction.

XII.

Minimum Wage.

That this Congress urges upon public consideration the evils produced by allowing the standard of living among the mass of the people to be fixed by unrestrained commercial competition. Under existing circumstances, the market price of unskilled labor is so low that in all modern States competition wages are popularly called "starvation wages." The Congress desires to point out that a healthy and vigorous national life can only be secured at present by fixing in all industries and in all districts a minimum wage sufficient to maintain laborers and their families in reasonable health and efficiency. The Congress points out that resolute agitation on the part of all electors can already secure a minimum living wage to all direct employees of the central State, the municipalities, and other local authorities; and that these bodies can also protect those whom they employ indirectly by the insertion of effective standard wage clauses in all contracts for public work and in all leases and concessions made to tramway companies, railway companies, dock companies, and other recipients of special powers and privileges. The Congress urges public authorities to endeavor, as far as pos-

sible, to organize and conduct public services and industries directly, without resorting to private contractors and companies. In the case of private employees, the Congress recommends Trade Unions and federations of Trade Unions in every industrial district to hold fast to the principle of the minimum living wage, and to resolutely limit by it all proposals—whether by sliding scale or otherwise—to make the remuneration of labor depend on the profits of the trade. In cases where the working classes themselves organize and employ labor, as in Co-operative Societies, the Congress feels justified in demanding the establishment of a minimum living wage as a pledge of the sincerity of the recognition by these societies of community of interest between the shareholders and their employees.

BASIS OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

The Fabian Society consists of Socialists.

It therefore aims at the re-organization of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit. In this way only can the natural and acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the whole people.

The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in Land and of the consequent individual appropriation, in the form of Rent, of the price paid for permission to use the earth, as well as for the advantages of superior soils and sites.

The Society, further, works for the transfer to the community of the administration of such Industrial Capital as can conveniently be managed socially. For owing to the monopoly of the means of production in the past, industrial inventions and the transformation of surplus income into Capital have mainly enriched the proprietary class, the worker being now dependent on that class for leave to earn a living.

If these measures be carried out, without compensation (though not without such relief to expropriated individuals as may seem fit to the community), Rent and Interest will be added to the reward of labor, the idle class now living on the labor of others will necessarily disappear, and practical equality of opportunity will be maintained by the spontaneous action of economic forces with much less interference with personal liberty than the present system entails.

For the attainment of these ends the Fabian Society looks to the spread of Socialist opinions, and the social and political changes consequent thereon. It seeks to promote these by the general dissemination of knowledge as to the relation between the individual and Society in its economic, ethical and political aspects.

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